

This story is an excerpt from the forthcoming book, *Whispers of What Might Have Been*, by Bertie Simmons.

While our focus was on providing a rigorous academic environment for our students, we also realized that it was the relationships that we established with them that would make the difference in their attitude about learning and about school. I was reminded of this many times over the years by former students. One example stands out in my mind.

It rarely snows in Houston, but during the December of this year it did. We were all excited as we watched the huge flakes drifting slowly to the ground. Many students rushed to the window, mesmerized as they witnessed this rare occurrence. Years later, Carlos Rincon, a former student described his memory of the morning on Facebook.

*“Most of the students had gone to class, but a select group of about twenty students skipped class and went outside to play in the snow. We’re from Houston and we don’t see it snow often. We were not about to be stuck in class while it was coming down outside. Straight up. So, these twenty kids, including me, started in the parking lot, full on scraping snow off the cars, having snowball fights, building snowmen, all that jazz. This was risky business for kids skipping class, yes, but it was snowing, and we didn’t care if we got caught. Let those suckers stay in class. It was worth any getting whatever punishment was to be given to us.*

*Well, after about five minutes of building snowmen and fooling around outside the office, out comes Doc, followed by a few administrators and office staff. We all stopped for a minute and collectively go, ‘We are busted!’ We knew we couldn’t play outside forever, so we were ready to be punished and ushered back to class. Well, that’s not what happened.*

*After giving us a hard time for a second and seeing why we weren’t in class, Doc goes, ‘So are you all going to keep standing there looking frightened, or is someone going to get more snow?’*

*Doc didn’t get angry at us. Doc understood. She knew sometimes kids will be kids and that it was snowing in Houston, Texas in December. Dr. Simmons AND a good portion of her administration spent the next two hours outside building snowmen and having snowball fights with all students who decided to skip class to play in the snow that day. It was AMAZING. That day, at least for a couple of hours, class didn’t matter, periods didn’t matter, and skipping class didn’t matter.*

*Moments like these are why the students gave Doc so much respect. She was strict when she needed to be, but she knew how to let loose, and she knew when to be fair. Many principals would have just punished us, thrown us in school suspension,*

*or sent us home. But Doc didn't. She and her administrators came outside to have a good time with us, and that is something Furr High School will never have again.*

*Doc and I had our differences on a couple of different occasions, but her commitment to students goes deeper than ANYONE I have ever met in the educational career field. Maybe some of the students did not understand that, but Doc gave everything she had to make that school a better place, and anyone who has ever spoken to her knows that. She brought that school back from the brink. She made it what it is today, and Furr High School will NEVER be the same without her."*

I clearly remember that event. We took pictures of the snowmen because they were so ugly. All of us had a good laugh about the fact that none of the students knew how to really make snowmen. Students from the deep East End of Houston had no idea about rolling big balls of snow for the body, finding objects to create facial features, or how to add arms to the body. While I realized that they had missed class, this gave them the opportunity to be creative, solve problems and experience joy. Others may not understand this philosophy, but it is what I think schools should be doing for our youth.